

The role of academic institutions in the development of language testing and assessment (LTA)

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Centre for Research in English Language Learning and Assessment (CRELLA)



CRELLA's founder and first Director



Cyril's vision

- a UK-based centre that would provide quality research and development in the areas of English language learning and assessment
- providing exam boards and govt organisations with consultancy in matters of test design, development and review

Cyril's vision

- opportunities for PhD students, post-doctoral fellows and experienced academics to engage and collaborate in LTA research
- a centre of research excellence that has won both national and international recognition
- but not the first such centre

Cyril - the historian... telling the story of places, people and events



Presentation overview

... describe a **range of academic institutional contexts** in which LTA research and consultancy has flourished over the past 50 years

... consider **who the key players were** and **what the individual teams within them accomplished**

... reflect on **their significance, their impact and their legacy** with regard to current LTA theory and practice

A RANGE OF ACADEMIC CONTEXTS

Some considerations and caveats

- narrowing the focus (e.g. exam boards not included)
- sources of data/information – not always easy
- subjective and partial coverage
- contexts with which Cyril had a personal connection

1. Department of Applied Linguistics, University of Edinburgh (UK)



THE UNIVERSITY
of EDINBURGH



1. Department of Applied Linguistics, University of Edinburgh (UK)

- first university-based centre outside the US to dedicate time and energy to LTA research
- late 1960s/1970s – ‘Edinburgh school’ of Applied Linguistics (AL)
- strong interest in interface between AL, language pedagogy and testing/assessment
- ECAL Vol 3 (OUP 1974) – 30pp section on testing
- ‘further reading’: Davies (1968), Lado (1961)

Some key players and projects (1)

- 1977 – ECAL Vol 4 : 10 sections (233pp) on testing, assessment and research design
- strong focus on theory and practice of testing language skills: Elisabeth Ingram, Alan Davies
- early ELP tests for international students
- Ingram: ELBA (Edinburgh)
- Davies: EPTB (Birmingham and British Council)

Some key players and projects (2)

- training ground for language testing experts: e.g. Charles Alderson, Liz Hamp-Lyons, Dan Douglas, Cyril Weir, Neil Jones
- role of Alan Davies: BAAL, AILA, *Applied Linguistics*, ILTA
- his focus on testing principles/practice, 'native speaker' issues and ethics (ILTA 2000 and 2007)
- 'a major humanising influence' (Brumfit 2001)

2. Department of Applied Linguistics, University of California at Los Angeles (US)



2. Department of Applied Linguistics, University of California at Los Angeles (US)

- a strong focus on applied linguistics in 1970s/1980s (like Edinburgh)
- early LT-related work: Grant Henning, Brian Lynch, Frances Hinofotis
- early graduates of the Applied Linguistics programme included J D Brown and Thom Hudson, Fred Davidson, Hossein Farhady

Some key players and projects

- Lyle Bachman arrived at UCLA in 1990 to strengthen LTA
- Bachman (1990) – *Fundamental Considerations...*, Bachman and Palmer (1996) - *Language Testing in Practice*
- new measurement techniques: IRT, MFRM, G-theory, SEM
- PhD students: Sara Cushing Weigle, Antony Kunnan, Jim Purpura, Yasuyo Sawaki, Xiaoming Xi, Gary Ockey, Nathan Carr, Lorena Llosa, Sun Young-Shin

3. Testing and Evaluation Unit, University of Reading (UK)



University of
Reading



3. Testing and Evaluation Unit, University of Reading (UK)

- Centre for Applied Language Studies (CALS)
- Wilkins, 1974 – notional/functional syllabuses
- self-supporting centre: language courses, teacher training, consultancy and MA/PhD
- staff included: Ron White, Keith Morrow, Keith Johnson
- translation of notions/function into earliest ‘communicative’ language tests

Some key players and projects (1)

- TEU - Arthur Hughes (*Testing for Language Teachers*, 1989)
- designing ELP tests for university and other test providers
- offering consultancy services and courses (eg BC-funded)
- teaching on PG programmes in applied linguistics and TEFL

Some key players and projects (2)

- 1983 seminar on *Current Developments in LT* – Hughes and Porter, 1983
- 1984 – new journal *Language Testing* – ‘forum devoted exclusively to the issues which concern those involved with, or simply interested in, the assessment of language ability in one form or another’
- 1984 – Porter brought in the TEEP (TEAP)
- 1986–2000 – Cyril Weir – Director of TEU
- key publications: Weir 1990 and 1993

Some key players and projects (3)

- CALS/TEU combined expertise – assessment module within AL/TEFL as well Master's level course and dissertation
- PhD students: Peter Storey, Hanan Khalifa, Jenny Bradshaw, Barry O'Sullivan, Toshihiko Shiotsu, Masashi Negishi, Alan Tonkyn, Rita Green, Jin Yan

4. Department of Linguistics and English Language, Lancaster University (UK)



4. Department of Linguistics and English Language, Lancaster University (UK)

- 1980s onwards
- strong reputation for training, consultancy and research in language testing and assessment
- key personnel: Charles Alderson, Dianne Wall, Caroline Clapham

Some key players and projects (1)

- 1985 – *Language Testing Update* (LTU) – edited by Charles Alderson, Pauline Rea-Dickins, Dianne Wall, Caroline Clapham, Jay Banerjee
- 1992-2004 – official ILTA newsletter
- key site for: washback/impact research; diagnostic assessment (DIALANG); EAP/ESP; reading/listening (inc newer methodologies)

Some key players and projects (2)

- 1995 – *Language Test Construction and Evaluation* – Alderson, Clapham and Wall
- CUP's Cambridge Language Assessment series – edited by Alderson and Bachman
- PhD training: inc Pauline Rea-Dickins, Gary Buck, Glenn Fulcher, Yoshinori Watanabe, Dianne Wall, Ali van Moere, Dina Tsagari, Spiros Papageoriou, Carl Spoetl
- Summer School (2001-), online MA in LT (2007-)

5. Language Testing Research Centre, University of Melbourne (Aus)



THE UNIVERSITY OF
MELBOURNE



5. Language Testing Research Centre, University of Melbourne (Aus)

- established in 1990
- an international reputation for contributions to language testing, language assessment and language programme evaluation over three decades
- not just English but various foreign languages and also indigenous languages

Some key players and projects (1)

- Alan Davies, Tim McNamara, Cathie Elder
- contributions to assessment literacy :
Dictionary of Language Testing (1999) and
Mark my Words video series (1996)
- establishment of ALTAANZ in 2012
- *Melbourne Papers in LTA*
- *Professional Certificate in Language Assessment* for teachers and practitioners

Some key players and projects (2)

- key areas of research:
 - performance testing and Rasch analysis
 - test ethics, fairness and social consequences
 - rater and interlocutor behaviour
 - LSP
 - policy formation
- PhDs: Tim McNamara, Cathie Elder, Tom Lumley, Annie Brown, Noriko Iwashita, Lyn May, Kathryn Hill, Luke Harding, John Pill, Sally O'Hagan, Susy Macqueen

SIGNIFICANCE, IMPACT AND LEGACY

1. Evolution of testing and assessment theory

- links between linguistics, applied linguistics and LTA, plus use of both quant and qual methodologies in LTA research (eg Edinburgh + UCLA)
- theories of communicative competence (eg Reading and UCLA)
- washback and impact, diagnostic assessment (eg Lancaster)
- ethics and social consequences, LSP (eg Melbourne)
- socio-cognitive frameworks (eg CRTEC and CRELLA)

2. Development of professional research network and community

- 1979 in Boston – Language Testing Research Colloquium (LTRC)
- Language Testing Forum (Lancaster in 1980)
- 1992 in Vancouver – International Language Testing Association (ILTA)
- LTRCs in Europe (1993), Asia (1999), Australasia (2006) and South America (2018)
- ALTE (1989), EALTA (2004), CALA/ACEL (2009), ALTAANZ (2012), AALA (2014), UKALTA (2016)

3. Collaborative research endeavours

- development of ELTS in 1970s (Edinburgh, Lancaster and Reading)
- IELTS 1989 (UK + Australian involvement)
- IELTS 1995 (UK, Australian, NZ and US involvement)
- Occupational English Test (OET) in Australia in late 80s/90s
- growth in funded research programmes, eg ETS, Cambridge, BC and Pearson

4. Growth of a postgraduate research cadre

- Edinburgh, UCLA, Reading in 1970s and 1980s
- Lancaster, Melbourne, Roehampton, CRELLA in later years
- network of Canadian universities
- onsite and distance-based, full and part-time courses at MA and PhD level
- PG summer schools, seminars, workshops
- increasing PG access across the world

5. Dissemination of LTA knowledge and practice

- growth during 1990s in general LTA-related textbooks for language testers and teachers
- Hughes (1989), Davies (1990), Weir (1990 and 1993), Bachman (1990), Alderson et al (1995), McNamara (1996), Bachman and Palmer (1996)
- growing focus on skills-related and specialist area volumes (YLS, LSP, technology) during 2000s, as well as on test ethics and social consequences

6. Dissemination of LTA publications in promoting assessment literacy

- academic monographs, edited collections, technical handbooks, testing encyclopaedia
- research reports – both hard copy and online
- Journals: *Language Testing* (1984), *Language Assessment Quarterly* (2003) and others
- other resources, eg ILTA Language Testing Bibliography and PhD Bibliography

7. Practical (applied) language test development and validation activity

- EPTB (Birmingham) and ELBA (Edinburgh)
- ELTS/IELTS (Edinburgh/Lancaster)
- TEAP/TEEP (Reading)
- OET (Melbourne)
- BART (CRELLA)

8. Advocacy and expertise in social policymaking and implementation

- advice to internal faculty staff on test use and score interpretation, eg admissions tutors, international office
- consultancy for external test users, eg immigration/medical/aviation contexts
- development of Codes of ethics and Guidelines for good practice (ALTE, ILTA, EALTA, etc)

Some concluding comments.....

*“For everything there
is a season, and a
time for every matter
under heaven.”*

[Ecclesiastes 3.1]

The astronomical clock in the old town
of Prague



Cyril's perspective.....

- commitment to working within university-based contexts
- capable of making a significant contribution in education and society
- need for theory-informed practice and practice-informed theory
- research, scholarship and consultancy
- proactive engagement with assessment agencies
- benefits of team working

*"If I have seen further
it is by standing on the
shoulders of giants."*

Words written in the 17th century by Sir Isaac
Newton, mathematician, astronomer and
physicist, in a letter to philosopher, architect and
polymath, Robert Hooke

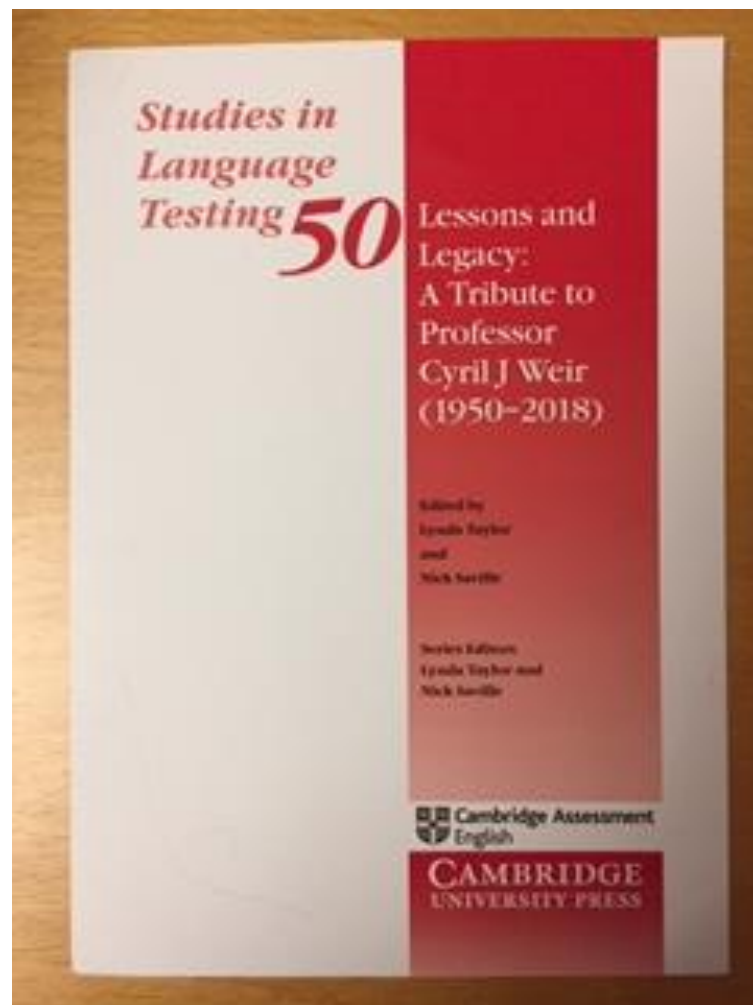


Taylor & Saville (eds), forthcoming

Lessons and Legacy: A Tribute to Professor Cyril J Weir (1950-2018)

Studies in Language Testing 50, CUP

Edited by
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and
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*Gratias maximas
tibi agimus,
Cyrillus –
honoramus te!*



Thank you!

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